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Special features of teaching Spanish to the Spanish speaking are identified and compared with objectives of teaching Spanish as a second language. Described are the (1) feasibility of achieving effective ability placement through a listening-comprehension test designed for use in Albuquerque Public Schools, (2) linguistic and motivational problems peculiar to non-native speakers of English, (3) difficulties encountered by Spanish teachers in bilingual programs, and (4) value of general student orientation. (AF)

PLACEMENT, METHODOLOGY, AND TECHNIQUES FOR THE STUDENT FROM SPANISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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By Rita Minkin

Hilda Taba, in her book Curriculum Development, Theory, and Practice states, "Education must work in the cultural setting of a given society at a given time, in a given place, shaping the individual to participate in that society." How often have so many of our schools, purporting to serve the education needs of the community, ignored the student involved and established goals, instructional procedures, and approaches that are unrealistic and impossible to attain!

It is very gratifying to witness the very earnest efforts made to meet the needs of a specific community through the implementation of bilingual programs in some sections of the southwest and the planning for such projects in others. This, however, is a rather recent development, whose far-reaching advantages and ensuing changes will not begin to be felt for many years to come in our high schools and colleges. In the meantime, it will be our very grave responsibility, as teachers of Spanish, to bend every effort to fulfill the needs and develop the potential of the bilingual student. Provided that we are able to interest, motivate, and develop this student's ability in Spanish, we will have contributed much to the fulfillment of the goals of the total school curriculum.

In the last decade we have witnessed many changes in our language classrooms brought about by public and government interest and support. We have responded by studying and attempting to incorporate the findings of linguistics, cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology of learning, and realistic testing and evaluation procedures in our teaching; we have attempted to implement methodology and approaches consistent with these formulated goals and objectives. Somehow in the bustle of all this activity, we seem to have lost sight of our Spanish-speaking student. Where does he fit in, and what do we do for him?

The over-all goals are the same for all students of Spanish, mainly, increasing mastery of the four language skills - understanding, speaking, reading, and writing, cultural insight and awareness, that is, experience in and knowledge of the dual culture, thus improving the student's self image by being aware of Spanish contributions to this dual culture, and, as the student progresses, literary acquaintance. The general methodology and approach are the same for the native speaker. The same principles that we find successful in the teaching of a foreign language to non-native speakers will prove successful in the teaching of native speakers providing that certain factors are taken into consideration and certain needs provided for.

Our native speakers come to us with varying degrees of Spanish language competence and cultural orientation. They may range all the way from fluent speakers of Spanish to very poor speakers. Among these

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poor speakers many lack a strong language background, even at high school level in both English and Spanish. They hear broken English and inadequate Spanish at home. Their parents, in their quite understandable desire to have their children learn English, often display a very negative attitude toward Spanish, insisting on the use of English while they provide poor models of speech. This results in interference from English to Spanish, as well as from Spanish to English, not only in the phonological area, but also in the conceptual area. Add to this the lack of environmental experiences necessary to successful school achievement and we are faced with students who are not school and learning oriented within the framework of middle-class American culture.

Education makes much of taking the student from where he is, recognizing what he brings with him and leading him on from there. We start then with the language that the student brings to school. The question is, where is the student in his language development? And how is the teacher, under pressure of many duties, especially at the beginning of school and confronted by a sea of anonymous faces in each class, to discover quickly where these students are, what their needs are, how to set the stage for effective teaching and establish a healthy classroom climate that will be conducive to learning on the part of all these students? Pre-planning and grouping students consistent with their abilities and achievement will certainly help. On what basis will this be done?

In the Albuquerque Public Schools, we use an instrument that has proved a real boon and has taken much of the guesswork out of student placement. This instrument is a listening-comprehension test in Spanish which was devised, developed, and implemented several years ago by our foreign language consultant, Miss Ann Komadina.

In developing this test, Miss Komadina worked closely with the Spanish teaching staff and especially with the school testing department which made a very careful item analysis count in order to insure greater validity of the test.

The Spanish Placement Test consists of eleven short stories in Spanish to which the students listen. After each story there are questions with five possible answers based on the story. This test is administered twice a year through FM radio, transmitted from the school station. In the spring it is administered in grades 6 through 11 to Spanish-speaking students who plan to enroll in Spanish for the first time the coming school year. It is again administered in the fall to Spanish-speaking students who missed the test in the spring, or who are transfers to the Albuquerque Public Schools. A passing score on this test plus other criteria such as verbal I.Q. scores, aptitude test results, teacher opinion, and grades in all subjects, but not necessarily in English, allows the student to by-pass half a level of Spanish in grade 7, or a whole level of Spanish in grades 9, 10, 11, or 12. Also, if we find that a student has had all or part of his training in a Spanish-speaking country, or a student who has developed

not only oral skills but literacy skills to a degree, we are quite flexible about placing him in a more advanced level - Spanish 3 or even 4 or 5 - depending on his demonstrable competence in the various skills.

Available statistics compiled by Miss Komadina over a five-year period indicate that the Spanish-speaking student who by-passes a course in Spanish on the basis of his score in the Spanish Placement Test along with other criteria at hand, adjusts very readily to an advanced level of Spanish, if he is immediately initiated into the skills of reading, spelling, and writing, and taught these skills as systematically as possible.

Miss Komadina, in cooperation with members of the teaching staff, has worked out a Guideline which is of great help to the teachers of those students who by-pass the basic level.

After placing the native speaker as advantageously as possible within the limitations imposed by the organizational structure of the school, we turn to the most important aspect of all - the business of teaching.

Increased motivation, personal satisfaction, and language competence can best be achieved by language study that has a good audio-lingual foundation. This is as true for the native as for the non-native speaker. The most effective teaching deals with identifying student problems and taking care of them through planned, sequential materials. We who teach natives are quite familiar with the general areas of difficulty, - use of obsolescent and archaic forms such as truje, vinites, hacina, fierro, etc.; loss, through disuse of some of the structures that would add variety and breadth to expression, such as the simple imperfect, the nosotros imperative, etc.; poor enunciation, faulty pronunciation, shift of stress patterns - váyamos, téngamos, etc., - inversion of sounds - niervo for nervio, pediórico for periódico, pader for pared, etc., interference from English in all areas - sound, structure, and syntax - vaso, invitar, fui pa atrás, tuve buen tiempo, etc.; a very limited vocabulary which necessitates the use of English words pronounced Spanish fashion, and deceptive cognates may be as deceptive for the native as the non-native.

Ideally, materials specially designed with the linguistic problems of this learner in view and built-in motivational features that would take into account the cultural and perceptual sets of the learner, would be a great contribution. As far as I know, there are no such materials available and I know of no one who is presently in the process of developing them. Therefore, the responsibility of helping and developing this student lies with the teacher. Much can be done, granted the willingness and genuine sincerity of the teacher to accept this exciting challenge.

Next to the learner himself, the teacher is the most important factor in the learning process. Sensitivity to the needs and educational problems of this student is a must. Teachers who have not experienced bilin-

gual problems themselves often fail to grasp the language handicap of others. Near-native competence in Spanish is another must. Also, the preparation of the teacher must include a study of the principles of applied linguistics, both as an aid to methodology and in the sequencing and tailoring of materials to fit the needs of these students.

Problems in motivation are among the most serious of all problems confronting teachers of these students. How can we get them to participate? How can we involve them? These are common, ever-recurring questions. The thoughtful application of learning theories will help us tremendously in developing techniques for this purpose. Some of the important considerations are: step-increment learning; development of analytical power based, whenever possible on conceptual and contrastive analysis between English and Spanish; avoidance of error, immediate reinforcement of successful response; appropriate practice to insure desired oral language development; spaced and varied practice activities to avoid boredom; analogizing from patterned, controlled practice to "for real" situations; and individualizing of instruction.

Most important of all, we must share with our students our expectations, that is, the objectives and design of the course, the knowledge of the nature of language and language learning and the practical, as well as the enriching reward of language mastery.

An orientation session, carefully planned, before initiating the course proper can be very helpful. I have found this so helpful, that I have used two class sessions for this purpose before starting regular classwork. As a matter of fact, in one school we have taken all the students in the foreign language department and had them meet in a large area and gone through the orientation session together. Orientation, however, must be on-going throughout the year. Practice of a skill without the student's understanding of what and why he is practicing leads to success in only a hit-or-miss fashion. Strong motivation, so necessary in learning any skill, springs from two main sources: specific evidence of progress in learning the skill and proof of its practical application.

All this seems like a large order and it is. So, let's take the long view while at the same time, through careful and thoughtful planning, do our best from minute to minute and day to day. IT CAN BE DONE!

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